

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DAVID H. MILLER, BOARD MEMBER
NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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CHAIRMAN HARKIN AND RANKING MEMBER COCHRAN

Thank you for this hearing and for the opportunity to present my thoughts regarding "Autism, Research, Treatment and Intervention".

I have the privilege of being here today, as a Board Member of Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) which is the second largest community college in the US. I have represented Fairfax County for the last 4 years on the NVCC Board and have recently been reappointed to another four year term by Chairman Bulova and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors .

I am also the co-founder of the "Community College Consortium on Autism and Intellectual Disabilities" which is comprised of 41 Community College Presidents from states that have the highest incidence of autism.

Dr. Mick Starceovich, the President of Iowa based Kirkwood Community College is a member of our Community College Consortium as is Dr. Clyde Muse, President of the largest community college in Mississippi- Hinds Community College. Both of these highly respected leaders could not be here today because of previously scheduled Board meetings.

Although I am the only "non-President" of our Consortium I have had the honor of working with 41 of the foremost educators in our nation some of whom are here with me today.

I would like to take a moment to introduce to the Subcommittee Mr. William Duncan, President of Taft College. President Duncan is also the Chairman of "The Community College Consortium on Autism and Intellectual Disabilities"; Dr. Wayne Burton, President of North Shore Community College (Member of our Executive Committee) and Dr. Steven Rose President of Passaic County Community College.

Also with me today, is Mr. Jeff Ross, the Director of Taft College's "Transition to Independent Living Program" which in my opinion is one of the foremost post secondary programs in the country for students with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities.

This hearing has a particular poignancy to me because I am also the father of two seven year old autistic boys who are identical twins-Joseph Harris Miller and William Louis Miller. Their sister, Sallie Kathryn Miller, is the youngest of the triplets and is a healthy, happy seven year old "princess".

Let me preface my comments, by giving the Subcommittee some perspective. I am not an educator by profession like President Duncan, President Burton and President Rose. I am not a therapist or an expert in the field of Autism and Intellectual Disabilities as is Mr. Ross. Nor I am not as well versed in the nuances of Autism and in meeting the daily (and nightly) challenges of autism as is my wife Lynn.

My comments are purely those of a parent, who is concerned about the long term ability of my children and children in similar circumstances to live independently and to develop a career track that will enable them to support themselves financially while at the same time meeting and overcoming challenges that probably you and I never had to face.

The chain of events that led me to this table begins like this. Almost three years ago, I was asked to give a presentation to the members of the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) on the authorization and appropriations process. During the course of that presentation, I referred to the then recently enacted “Combating Autism” legislation as an example of the authorizing and appropriations committees working together to produce a truly remarkable piece of legislation. As you know the “Combating Autism Act of 2006” (P.L. 109-416) allocates nearly \$1 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to conduct autism, research, screening, surveillance and intervention.

As a preface to my comments, I indicated that I had two young sons (five years of age at the time) who had been diagnosed with autism and that I as a parent was very concerned about their future. After my presentation, I was approached by the then President of Taft College Dr. Roe Darnell. Dr. Darnell told me about the program at Taft College, called the Transition to Independent Living Program (TIL), which since 1995 has developed a remarkable record of success with autistic and intellectually disabled post secondary students.

The Taft College Program is a two year residential program that houses 28 students in our dormitories and 20 students who live independently within the community. The curriculum consists of 38 courses which are approved by the California Community College Chancellors Office.

The curriculum is life skills and vocational based and the students receive a Certificate of Completion from Taft College when they demonstrate competency in the following areas: Meal planning and preparation, Housekeeping, Laundry, Money Management, Personal Safety, Internet Access and Safety, Personal Advocacy, Individual Rights and Responsibilities, Work Ethic and Work Experience.

As the TIL Program services students from the entire State, TIL assists students with their transition back to local communities. The program also tracks all of its graduates for a period of 10 years and produces an annual Student Outcome” Report which demonstrates dramatic results:

- 95% of TIL graduates live independently
- 93% are competitively employed (National average is 14%)
- 93% receive no financial assistance from other agencies or their families
- 97% report that they are satisfied with their adult life.
- 30 hours of home assistance is provided on average each month (State average is 88 hrs per month).

It is estimated that the above savings in home assistance services alone saves the citizens of California over \$110 million over 40 years not counting the taxes TIL graduates pay as well as services that they consume. Obviously, “quality of life” has no price tag.

Taft College services all of California and has a waiting list of 4 years.

When I looked for similar services in Northern Virginia I found that there was almost no post secondary educational or training opportunities for children with autism who had graduated from high school or had reached the age of twenty-one.

Those opportunities that were available were either prohibitively expensive or were research based.

None of these “opportunities” were readily adaptable to the broad range and numbers of students we in “Higher Education” can expect to flood our campuses in the not too distant future.

As a harbinger of things to come for our college campuses and for our Nation, Director Ross, who follows these trends, reported the alarming statistic that the number of autistic children enrolled in California’s fourth and fifth grades currently exceeds the entire number of adults receiving assistance for intellectual disabilities which numbers approximately 350,000.

The actual numbers of autistic children enrolled in California is indeed alarming however, the trend is identical for states that are not as large nor as diverse. In my own Commonwealth of Virginia a ten year study of autism prevalence from 1992-2003 pursuant to the reporting requirements of the Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reported a 519% growth rate of autism from 1992-2003 with a 17% annual growth. That study is now six years old and the numbers of children with autism reported in Virginia’s public schools has almost tripled since 2003.

Mr. Chairman, in your State of Iowa, the prevalence study reported a 1,727% cumulative growth rate of autism from 1992-1993 with a 33% annual growth rate of 33%. Senator Cochran, the same study showed a 3,788 cumulative growth rate for autism in 1992-2003 with a 53% average annual growth rate. I am sure that the incredible growth of students with autism in Virginia since 2003 is similar in your states.

Clearly, the vast majority of autistic children are still under the age of eighteen with a significant number just now entering middle and high school. We at America’s community colleges, including NVCC, are beginning to see the first significant influx of students with autism.

Community colleges have, for a number of years, had intellectually disabled students on our campuses, often times with no programs to serve them. Because most states provide for an “open admissions” policy, many of these students enroll in regular academic classes. However, a great majority of these students are unable to meet the normal academic requirements of these classes; are soon placed on academic probation and later are dismissed for academic reasons.

Unfortunately, most of these students leave their secondary or post secondary experience with no preparation for living independently or with job skills. Although some states contribute to their welfare until the age of twenty-one, the vast majority provide for no or minimal assistance after that age.

Thankfully, educators across the country, notably Dr. Starcevich and Dr. Muse are working on ways to provide innovative practical programs for these students once they leave the secondary school environment as are their colleagues in other states such as President Dale Chapman and Dr. Linda Chapman from Lewis and Clark Community College, Dr. Pamela Transue, President, Tacoma Community

College, Dr. Debbie Sydow President, Onondaga Community College, Dr. Peter Sireno, President, Darton College, Dr. Wright Lassiter, Chancellor, Dallas County Community College, Dr. Ray D. Pasquale, President, Community College of Rhode Island, Dr. Raymond Yannuzzi, President, Camden County Community College and many others.

Your colleague, Chairman Edward Kennedy of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) is very much aware of these trends and described the coming influx of autistic students at post secondary level as a “tsunami”.

Thanks to the efforts of Anthony K. Shriver, Founder and Chairman of Best Buddies International, Inc. and President Wayne Burton, we had the opportunity to speak directly with the Chairman and work with him and Senator Enzi on designing a program to assist students with autism and intellectual disabilities.

While not perfect, Section 767 of HR 4137 (the Higher Education Opportunity Act) authorizes the Secretary of Education to award five year grants to support model demonstration programs that “promote the successful transition of students with intellectual disabilities into higher education.

Although no specific amount is authorized in PL-110-315, Chairman Kennedy recently wrote a letter to you Chairman Harkin and to you Senator Cochran requesting funding for this program in the amount of \$35 million for FY 2010.

Chairman Kennedy’s May 7, 2009 letter categorizes his funding request as follows:

“*It is estimated that \$24 million of the \$35 million will fully fund programs at ten community colleges, enabling each college to provide life skills and vocational training for approximately 75 intellectually disabled students.

*\$9 million will provide funding for thirty programs at four year colleges, with an average funding of \$300,000 per institution. Each grant will provide academic and other instructional courses for approximately 10 intellectually disabled students.”

The reason for this difference in funding is that, as stated in the Chairman’s correspondence, the vast majority of autistic and intellectually disabled students “attend community colleges because of their open admissions policies”.

In addition community colleges are limited by law in their ability to pay for the true cost of these programs. Based on the experience of Taft College’s successful TIL program the cost to operate this type of program for 75 students is approximately \$30,000 per student with the average annual budget of around \$1 million. A program at a typical four year university for 8-10 students will cost approximately \$300,000 as the university serves far fewer autistic students and has the ability to draw on other sources of income including raising tuition.

As community colleges like Kirkwood or Hines can only charge a maximum of approximately \$3,000, the remaining \$27,000 in operational costs can only be borne by the Federal Government. Infrastructure and other non-operational capital costs must be borne by the educational institution.

It is our understanding, Mr. Chairman and Senator Cochran, that your subcommittee has allocated approximately \$15 million for this program. We are appreciative of your efforts particularly given the fiscal demands of your subcommittee in this time of economic hardship.

We hope that this amount at a minimum be retained in conference and that you consider allocating this amount, consistent with Chairman Kennedy's letter, on a 3 to 1 basis so that community colleges and universities are able to compete for these funds separately.

In addition, we thank you for the language that we understand is in the Subcommittee's report that directs the Secretary of Education to award grants for no less than \$1million per grant. Anything less would preclude Kirkwood Community College, Hinds Community College and most other community colleges from offering life skills and vocational training programs for their autistic students.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering any questions.